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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRUSSELS 001749

SIPDIS

STATE PASS EUR/WE KATE SHARP, AF/C CHRISTOPHER LAMORA AND  
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SUBJECT: BELGIUM AND THE CONGO PART TROIS: MFA CONTACTS  
DISCUSS BELGIUM'S NEXT MOVE AT THE UN

REF: A. BRUSSELS 1680

[1](#)B. BRUSSELS 1693

Classified By: Economic and Political Counselor Richard M. Eason for re  
asons 1.4 (B) and (D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: PolEconCouns and Poloff joined MFA Congo  
Contacts for a wide ranging discussion on Belgium's latest  
efforts to end the crisis in the Democratic Republic of the  
Congo. Our contacts said Foreign Minister De Gucht would fly  
to New York November 25 and 26 to attempt to bolster the  
MONUC mandate, and were especially interested in controlling  
the flow of minerals out of the Congo. They wanted to know  
what the U.S. was considering for an export control regime,  
clearly looking for ideas. They described the current press  
rancor between FM De Gucht and Development Minister Charles  
Michel and his EU Commissioner father as another incarnation  
of Flemish and Walloon politics. De Gucht's public criticism  
of Kabila was normal for an outspoken politician from  
Flanders, where the public is critical of African corruption.

As Francophone politicians, the two Michels have taken the  
opportunity to carry messages between African leaders and PM  
Leterme; the Walloon public has been more tolerant of African  
dysfunction. Regardless of which minister speaks with key  
African leaders, the MFA and Minister De Gucht are still  
looking for solutions to stop the current violence. As the  
possibility of an EU force seems more and more distant, they  
are now turning to a MONUC - bolstering strategy. End  
Summary.

DE GUCHT TO NEW YORK TO BOLSTER MONUC  
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[1](#)2. (C) FM De Gucht will be in New York City with Belgian  
Great Lakes Envoy Karl Dehaene November 25 and 26 meetings at  
the UN. His stated goal is to strengthen the MONUC mandate.  
Dehaene, and his colleagues, Congo Desk Officer Koen Adam and  
Rwanda/Burundi Desk Officer Hugues Chantry, were all focused  
on a MONUC solution, and were particularly interested in  
finding a way that MONUC might be empowered to do more to  
limit violence in the region, with or without the Congolese  
Armed Forces (FARDC). In typical Belgian fashion, they might  
be grasping at the easiest or most likely consensus they deem  
possible, as long as there is a chance it moves towards their  
goal of a stronger force. They hope that nations  
contributing troops will be supportive of a more robust  
mandate.

[1](#)3. (C) They seemed particularly focused on controlling the

exploitation of eastern Congo's natural resources. Belgium supports MONUC having a role, but they suggested several options for tracking and controlling the commodity flow. One possibility they mentioned (supported by Rwandan President Kagame) was a multilateral approach under the Tri Partite regime, perhaps a Tri Partite Plus effort. They asked if the U.S. was actually working on an IOM approach, they had learned of during the Brussels Great Lakes meeting October 24, where IOM could play a role in border control. When Poloff asked which approach seemed most plausible MONUC, Tri-partite or IOM, the answer was a conjunction of all three. Poloff responded that a conjunction doesn't always function. Sorry Schoolhouse Rock.

14. (C) Sensing a subtle yet obvious change in Belgium's main goal to stop the violence in Eastern Congo, Poloff asked point blank if the commodity tracking - border control effort was the new strategy because the European force effort had failed. The three contacts said that Belgium would continue to suggest the option, but reality was that a European force was not supported by other EU members, and if one materialized it would be too late. This quickly broke into a heated discussion on how soon was soon enough.

#### MINISTER DE GUCHT VS MICHELS ON CONGO POLICY

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15. (C) EU Commissioner Louis Michel met with Congolese President Kabila last month, as did his son Charles Michel. The younger Michel returned to Brussels with a letter from Kabila to PM Letermé calling for a warming of Belgian - Congo

BRUSSELS 00001749 002 OF 002

relations. The same letter also made clear that Kabila considered FM De Gucht persona non grata and that Congo would not work with him. The Michels have taken the opportunity to become more involved in Africa policy, with EU Commissioner Louis Michel receiving a call from rebel leader Laurent Nkunda over the weekend. In response, De Gucht called the Michels disloyal in a front page interview with the Flemish (leftist) paper DE MORGEN, and underscored that as Foreign Minister he managed foreign policy and directing other ministers to butt out.

16. (C) Our MFA contacts did not find the current row particularly strange from the Belgian domestic perspective. They pointed that De Gucht has always been outspoken, and as a Flemish politician, scored points with the Flemish majority over his strong criticism of corruption and human rights abuses in Congo. His standing in public opinion was not tarnished by his inability to meet with Congolese leaders or the ensuing deep freeze in Belgian - Congo relations. They suggested that the Michels, as Francophone politicians, spied an opening to increase their political standing within the Francophone community, where the public has been less critical of governance problems in former colonies. The June 2009 Belgian regional elections are important for Belgian politicians, both in Flanders where De Gucht's Open VL & D will face stiff competition from Flemish nationalist parties, and the Michels' MR will face strong competition from the Francophone Socialists in Wallonia and Brussels. Though the Open VL & D and MR represent the same liberal center-right pro-business range in the political spectrum, they answer to two different constituencies: Flemish and Francophone.

Comment

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17. (C) FM De Gucht and the Belgian MFA are keen to find a solution to the violence in eastern Congo, whether or not FM De Gucht is persona non grata in Kinshasa and Goma. De Gucht and his team will arrive in New York next week looking for a way to strengthen MONUC's mandate, as deployment of a European force becomes less likely. The U.S. should look to Belgium as an ally and be open in suggesting a solution that works, if we are ready to do so. We should particularly take

note of their current effort to find a way to control the flow of commodities that fund armed groups and contribute to the violence. The Belgian government is definitely open to different options, asking us for and suggesting several ideas and mixes of solutions for the eastern Congo. More than anything, they want to find a result or way forward; there is always the chance they might jump at the easiest consensus, though they have been resolute on a tougher MONUC that would act forcefully to end the current violence. The US delegation and Washington should expect Belgium to reach out prior to UN meetings next week. There may be an opportunity to channel Belgian efforts in New York, to help ensure Belgium does not opt for whatever option seems most likely or support a conjunction of all options on the table. Unfortunately, not all conjunctions function.

FOX

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